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Written Testimony in Support of LD 1573

An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues

Health and Human Services Committee

Monday, May 3, 2021

To Senator Claxton, Representative Myer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1573 An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues.

My name is Margaret Zack and I work as a DSP and as a supervisor of DSPs in caring for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Our work has become much more challenging since the pandemic. Several staff resigned due to fear of contracting Covid-19 and to the knowledge that their low pay did not justify them risking their health or the health of members of their family. We were already short-staffed even prior to the pandemic. Now we addressing a crisis which has required many of us to work many hours of overtime. We cannot leave our shift if there is no one to replace us, so despite being exhausted and having obligations at home we stay on, providing care that is compromised. The ratio of staff to clients is not what it should be and exhausted workers do not provide the best care. In attempts to hire new staff I find that people are interested in the job and appear willing to apply until they learn the pay, then they say they cannot afford to take the job if it were offered. Despite several months of ads in our rural flyer I have been unable to hire a single person due to the low wages we are offering. I urge you to support LD1573 which would provide to direct care workers wages of no less than 125% of the minimum wage. This increase in pay would acknowledge the value of the present workers and would provide an incentive to new employees who might be interested in the job but cannot afford to accept it. The situation at present feels like a sinking ship which needs a serious rescue. The increase in wages provided by LD1573 would help to to right the ship.